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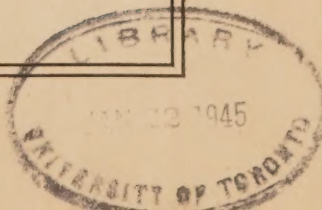
Great Britain

by Miss Agathe Doré

Issued by

The Department of National War Services

OTTAWA
EDMOND CLOUTIER
PRINTER TO THE KING'S MOST EXCELLENT MAJESTY
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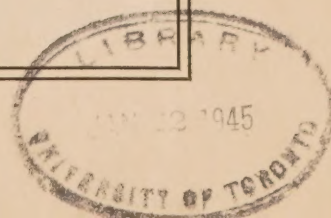
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Major-General the Honourable L. R. LAFLÈCHE, D.S.O.,
Minister of National War Services,
OTTAWA.

Sir,—In submitting a review of my visit to the United Kingdom, I wish to express to the Dowager Marchioness of Reading, chairman of the Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence; the ladies of the Overseas Department of Women's Voluntary Services; Lady Ruth Balfour, the Scottish chairman; and all officials of Women's Voluntary Services, appreciation for their cordial welcome and the facilities so generously extended for acquiring a knowledge of their widespread operations.

My thanks are also due to Miss M. L. Harford, chief woman officer of the Council of Social Services, for information furnished with respect to that organization, as also the Women's Group on Public Welfare. Their kindly assistance was invaluable.

May I be permitted to explain that, in the belief that it would be more in keeping with the purpose of my mission to submit a factual report, personal references and stories of human interest have been omitted.

For the opportunity of serving my country in this capacity even for so short a time, I am deeply grateful to you as Minister of National War Services, and trust that the information as presented, despite its brevity, will be useful.

AGATHE DORÉ.

MONTREAL,
May, 1944.

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PREFACE

In view of the splendid contribution in so many forms which the women of the Dominion have made in aid of the successful prosecution of the war, the Department of National War Services arranged that four Canadian women—who were prepared to accept the risks and to whom accordingly the Department is very grateful—should proceed to the United Kingdom, there to observe the voluntary work being performed by the women of Britain.

Selection was made of three Canadian voluntary workers—Mrs. Gordon Konantz of Winnipeg and Miss Agathe Doré of Montreal, both of whom had been closely associated with women's voluntary services; Mrs. Jules Laine of Toronto, a prominent worker with the Canadian Red Cross Society; and, for departmental purposes, Miss Helen Doherty, a member of the staff of the Department of National War Services.

The information they were able to secure is now being made available in this form to the women of Canada, in the hope that it will be a further inspiration to their fellow workers who have so valiantly carried on.

Introduction

This report covers a period of five weeks spent in studying the voluntary work being done by the women of Britain under war conditions. The particular organizations investigated were the Women's Voluntary Services, the National Council of Social Services and the Women's Group on Public Welfare.

Officials of the Women's Voluntary Services were most generous in supplying information and no pains were spared to furnish a complete and accurate picture of the work done.

I saw the various activities of the W.V.S. from top to bottom, starting at National Headquarters in London, passing through the London setup and later visiting the number 9 Regional Headquarters at Birmingham, the Scottish Headquarters at Edinburgh, Glasgow, Perth and the surrounding district.

The Women's Group on Public Welfare, being in association with the National Council of Social Service, these two assignments merged into one really, because Miss M. L. Harford, Chief Woman Officer of the National Council of Social Service is also Secretary of the Women's Group on Public Welfare. I was warmly received at the Headquarters of the two organizations, 26 Bedford Square, London.

Detailed reports of the organizations investigated follow.

The Women's Voluntary Services, currently known as the W.V.S., was established in 1938, at the request of the Home Secretary, to organize the services of voluntary women workers and train them to assist the local authorities in measures of protection against air attacks.

The Chairman of the W.V.S. is the Dowager Marchioness of Reading, D.B.E., and the three vice-chairmen are Lady Iris Capell, Miss Marjorie Maxse, C.B.E., and Mrs. M. A. Hamilton. The chairman of the Scottish Department is Lady Ruth Balfour.

The W.V.S. is a national voluntary organization operating in the whole of the British Isles. Its overseas department is in constant touch with organizations of a similar nature throughout the British Empire. There are a number of W.V.S. organizations in India, Burma, Assam, and South Africa. They are not actually branches of the British W.V.S. but function along similar lines, and in some instances co-operate by sending gifts of goods or money.

The W.V.S. is a pre-war organization to the extent that it was created before the war, in 1938, its purpose at that time being the registration and training of women volunteers for air raid protection work. Since its present aims and functions are definitely for war purposes and not peace-time interests, it cannot be called a pre-war organization, especially since 1939, when it changed its name to Women's Voluntary Services for Civil Defence.

The personnel of the W.V.S. is considered entirely voluntary, though there are a certain number of paid civil servants doing clerical work at Headquarters. The whole executive staff with the exception of the General Secretary is unpaid personnel.

Since the war began W.V.S. has made few changes in its organization and functions, but has merely broadened its sphere of activity according to the necessities of the hour. The general pattern is the same as it was before the war.

In addition to A.R.P., the activities now carried on by the W.V.S. are evacuation, nurseries, salvage, service welfare, canteen, nursing, transport, care and clothing of refugees, funds and savings.

All elements of the population, men, women and children benefit from the activities of the W.V.S.

Description of Activities

The activities of the W.V.S., though wide and varied, are relatively easy to describe because they all tend towards the same goal—Civil Defence. The pattern of the organization is simple. It works in conjunction with the Government and the local authorities. The Headquarters work in close co-operation with and under the guidance of Government departments, while the local branches work in association with the local authorities. For example, the chairman of the W.V.S. works directly with the Home Secretary, while the heads of various departments work with the Ministries of different Government Departments involved. The heads of the Regional Departments work with the heads of the local authorities whether county, borough, urban or rural, as the head of Regional Administration of the W.V.S. deals with the chief officer of the county, and the whole pattern of the W.V.S. follows these lines from top to bottom breaking down to the individual job. There is thus for every Government or Local Authority Official connected with Civil Defence a corresponding number in the W.V.S. working in close co-operation and under his supervision.

There are more than a million volunteers working for the W.V.S. in the British Isles; they work for twenty different Ministries and Government Departments.

The W.V.S. is divided into 11 Regions. The National Headquarters are in London, the Department of Metropolitan and Greater London W.V.S. which is Region 5, is located in the same premises as National Headquarters, which also shelters all departments. Scotland is Region 11 with Headquarters at Edinburgh.

The Region itself breaks down to County Borough, (a large city such as Birmingham, for example, is a County Borough) and County. The County breaks down to Municipal Borough, Urban District and Rural District; these last two break down to village representatives.

The W.V.S. uniform is maroon and bottle green. It consists of a top coat made of greyish green tweed, cut on great-coat lines, a two-piece suit of the same tweed worn with a maroon coloured crepe blouse, or a green crepe dress for summer wear, or, a light wool crepe dress of the same greyish green made on simple conservative lines. There are two sorts of head-gear, a plain up-turned brimmed green felt hat with a maroon band on which is a W.V.S. pin, or a green beret on which the W.V.S. crest is embroidered in maroon and green. A green, maroon and grey striped woollen scarf is also worn by some members. The wearing of the uniform is optional. There is a W.V.S. pin and a W.V.S. brooch; the badge is given to volunteers after sixty hours of work and the higher officials wear badges indicating their rank.

Training

Every W.V.S. volunteer is given a basic training of five lectures on immediate aid, anti-gas, fire prevention, A.R.P., and the place of the W.V.S. in Civil Defence. Sometimes the training takes the form of quizzes and play-lets. This is a most effective way of training. Training is done mostly at Headquarters in a room known as the School. There are different courses and more intensive training as the member becomes more active and assumes greater responsibility in the organization. The housewives in the poor districts are given their training mostly in their own homes at first. This usually develops to two or three housewives being trained together and then ten or twelve in the same street and so on until there is a group large enough and well enough trained to form a regular class, when they can hold their own regular meetings. Plenty of patience is required for this sort of training, indifference and rebuke at first are to be coped with, and then the loss of

interest. In training volunteers of this type, great pains must be taken and considerable difficulties are experienced. A variety of subjects having nothing to do with Civil Defence has to be studied before any worthwhile results are obtained. The pattern of the W.V.S. in Scotland is exactly like that of England. The Scottish Region which is No. 11 is subdivided into five districts for administrative purposes.

The W.V.S. takes precautions to be courteous and businesslike in all its dealings with the volunteers. All promotions and demotions are considered carefully and volunteers involved are notified by letter ratified by the different committees. A state of complete harmony is thus maintained.

The Regions send quarterly reports to Headquarters. The Counties send in their reports through the Regions. The departments of records and statistics at Headquarters keep complete data of the work done and of the number of volunteers in the whole organization. A record of these statistics is sent regularly to the Home Office. The Regions keep up-to-date records of the activities of their members by a system of four card indexes. From these records they send to Headquarters a return of statistics made on a special form. This form of return of statistics is made along the same lines as the Headquarters statistics form sent to the Home Office. Matter recorded and figure columns are the same, so one can compile data quickly and easily since one form complements the other. The rural village centre has only a few records to keep on its index card and sends its records of the work of its volunteers to rural district representatives who in turn report for all these to the County. The County reports to the Region and the Region reports to Headquarters. From Headquarters the information is passed on to the Home Office which thus gets a complete and accurate picture of the work done and the number of volunteers doing it, and also the number of volunteers who are not regular workers but could be used in an emergency.

The Overseas Department of the W.V.S. keeps a record of gifts received and allocations made. It also thanks the senders of gifts and has issued special pamphlets to keep them informed as to where these gifts go and to what sort of people they are given.

Air Raid Precautions

Besides the elementary training in A.R.P. the W.V.S. members are given lectures on questions connected with post-raid services, and on Incident Posts which are maintained after a raid on the spot near the scene of the bombing and at Rest Centres. At W.V.S. Headquarters, classes are held at the School where volunteers are given A.R.P. problems to solve and everyone in the room can give an opinion and discuss the procedure. These courses are very effective. Volunteers love them and in this way learn a great deal with little effort in a short time.

A.R.P. is also taught in convents to the nuns, even to cloistered nuns. Some of them were sent to the Government School for the most advanced training. The W.V.S. has paid the training of one of these nuns elected to teach the nuns in other convents. The A.R.P. department also has connections with housewives concerning problems arising in air-raid shelters.

Clothing

The W.V.S. is responsible for all the clothing given in the British Isles for civilian relief and serves as the purchasing agent for the Lord Mayor's Fund which consists of money raised in the United Kingdom and collected for the sole purpose of buying clothes for bombed out civilians. In addition to bombed out persons, clothing is given to refugees, evacuees and children in the nurseries. All the clothes other than those provided by the Lord Mayor's Fund are donations from overseas; Canada, the United States of America, South America,

South Africa. These donations are made voluntarily by organizations in these countries who also send used clothing which proves of a great value. The first clothing given a bombed out (who often is in his night clothes) is always used clothing given without coupons. It is called currently the "iron ration." For all new clothes in the regular distribution, coupons must be given, but money never.

All this clothing is kept in large warehouses or stores known as clothing depots. Each Region and the biggest cities, of course, have huge clothing depots that feed the smaller ones. There are also mobile clothing vans sent to the scenes of disaster. Each Region, depending on its number of inhabitants, its refugees and evacuees and its nurseries, reserves a quota of clothing which is kept replenished, and ready for any emergency. There are also additional depots called "shadow depots" located at reasonable distances from large clothing depots that could be used in case of bombing of the principal depot. The location is usually kept secret and there are two different ways to get to it in case of a traffic jam in a blitz, and only a few persons have this chart and the power to release it. The clothing services keep in constant touch with the Government Department responsible for clothing regulations and always have up-to-date information on the matter. The clothing is kept in perfect order everywhere and articles in stock are accounted for accurately.

Great care is taken in the distribution of clothing with consideration given to social status of the individual to whom it is given, his needs, his tastes and his figure.

Besides clothing depots, there are clothing exchanges especially for children's clothing. At a clothing exchange, one can take garments and shoes that children have outgrown and, depending on their coupon value, can choose garments or shoes of equivalent value in a larger size that will fit the child. This clothing is assessed by volunteer appraisers. Needless to say, there are worn out things at these exchanges, but they must be in very good order. Sometimes, garments are made over when some of the clothing brought is thought good enough to accept but would be hard to get rid of. A card index is kept of all clothing brought in and given out. This practice of exchange is of great value, especially for shoes, and mothers of all sections of society are using this method of exchange for growing children. There are Mobile Clothing Exchanges now. The clothing is distributed in vans that move from one end of the city to another, in small towns, or from one village to another or even from one end of England to the other, so that proud mothers will not see their children dressed in the garments they saw on the backs of their neighbours before. In that way no garment can be recognized.

The "Make Do and Mend Clinic" is another form of work referred to the clothing department. Work parties assemble one or several days a week to rip old clothes and make them into new garments. These are used like all others, for evacuees, refugees, etc., and are sent to clothing depots. A lot of clothing is made in this way for the children, the nurseries, and a great amount is kept in reserve to be sent to the invaded countries of Europe after liberation. Housewives are encouraged to use this method of "make do and mend" for their own clothes and are constantly kept informed of new and better methods by talks and lessons.

Food

The W.V.S.'s food department gives advice on all questions connected with the organization of canteens, mobile and static kitchens, equipment, training of staff, etc. Communal feeding and food education are also part of the job. W.V.S. volunteers staff canteens, kitchens, mobile and static, like the Queen's Messengers, for instance. The Queen's Messengers comprise a convoy of thirteen vehicles, the first one a runner on a motor-cycle, the other vans fully equipped to serve 780 people in two hours. They are self-contained, ready to prepare on

call tea, coffee, soup, and sandwiches, and they are always the first to arrive on the scene of disaster in rural districts. There are 21 convoys of this kind in the country. Mobile and semi-mobile kitchens are organized on same principles, also carrying food and equipment in two lorries, but they have to mount literally a complete kitchen out doors with a real stove complete with hot plate and oven with ten cookers. It takes four hours from the time they arrive on the spot until they can serve a hot meal to 500 persons. They could in a serious emergency, serve a thousand. When practising, they go where there is a British restaurant in the community and serve their meals there.

British restaurants are communal kitchens where a complete hot meal is served to anybody for one shilling at midday only. Meat rations being scanty, one must eat out once in a while to catch up. The Government has therefore instituted British restaurants everywhere, in large and small towns alike to cope with the situation.

In rural areas where it is impossible to set up British restaurants, there exists a "pie scheme" which makes provision for meat pies to be sold at the village store or in mobile vans. This arrangement fills the same need as the British restaurants.

W.V.S. keeps posted the volunteers and those they help on ration regulations and any information which the Ministry of Food wishes the public to know.

Another food activity is hot meals for school children. This scheme brings or prepares meals on the spot thus enabling them to be better fed, keep fitter and become better citizens in the future. W.V.S. has volunteers trained for teaching how to cook and mend, working in Government contractor schemes so the site where they work becomes self-supporting. The W.V.S. also works in emergency feeding schemes.

Housewives

The Housewife Section of the W.V.S. teaches the woman with small children who cannot go out of her home to work, how to serve and be useful to the community and thus do her part in the war effort. This is one of the biggest educational jobs of the W.V.S., also one that requires the most patience. Housewives generally from poor densely populated districts, often uneducated, are given instruction at home in such subjects as immediate aid, A.R.P., anti-gas, fire fighting, and civil defence in general. They are encouraged to collect salvage, money for National Savings, and to become street leaders or post leaders in helping the wardens in post-raid duties. They are taught to take care of themselves, their households and to help their neighbours in an emergency.

W.V.S. trains the housewives on a large scale, it gives lessons on various subjects like care of furniture, "make and mend," coal, fire wastage, etc., and care and preparation of food. The W.V.S. housewife is given of course the W.V.S. basic training mentioned previously. In the rural districts, she is given training to take care of almost any emergency should an airplane crash in her field or garden.

The housewife section is one of the most valuable of the W.V.S. The housewife being the backbone of civilian life, her co-operation is essential and the necessity of her training is vital. Housewives are regarded as the second line of civil defence.

Nurseries

Nurseries are known at the W.V.S. as the Under-Five Department. This department deals with child welfare questions and is associated with the National Council for Maternity and Child Welfare in the child care reserve scheme and acts as the agent of the Ministry of Health in evacuating from London areas unaccompanied children under five. Five being the school age in England, children over that age fall under the supervision of the Board of Education.

There are several kinds of nurseries. The wartime day nurseries operate either twelve or fourteen hours a day. There are also residential nurseries for evacuated children. Some of these keep the children during the week, only, and send them home to their parents over the week-end. Other types are receiving nurseries where a child is admitted before going to a residential nursery, or while a mother is being confined or held in a hospital; nursery schools, and short-stay nurseries. The W.V.S. helps staff these nurseries with volunteers under professional guidance, although all nurseries have paid professional and domestic help. The W.V.S. looks after the admission of children, the evacuation, the transportation, the clothing, the toys and toy making schemes. Children are very well fed in the nurseries and most of them are healthier than ever before.

Residential nurseries are mainly situated in Wales and in the Highlands of Scotland, far from any possible air attack. Castles, manor houses and shooting lodges have been given over for them. W.V.S. is responsible for their supervision, and in the case of older children of school age, W.V.S. has assisted the teachers with school lessons, story telling, games, etc.

Salvage

The Salvage Department acts as a liaison office with the Ministry of Supply and assists local authorities in the collection of salvage and with salvage campaigns. It keeps the housewives posted on the necessity for collecting salvage and the kind required. It makes and distributes posters during salvage campaigns. Volunteers staff salvage depots. There are thousands of these depots all over the British Isles, usually located in empty stores.

These depots are maintained for the depositing of salvage by individuals in every district and town. People put their pride aside and carry from time to time all the salvage they can gather, old newspapers, bottle caps, rubber goods, matches, rags, cartons, paper boxes, etc. At these depots, volunteers sort, bundle and prepare for shipping all the salvage which is sent to the dumps where it is sold.

There is a children's salvage scheme known as the "cog scheme." It works in connection with the Board of Education for salvage in schools. W.V.S. has inaugurated this scheme throughout the country and it has proved a valuable aid in the collection of salvage.

Savings

The Savings Department works in close co-operation with the National Savings Department. It helps with the distribution of forms and pamphlets, and also with the collection of savings among the housewives which is recognized as the big contribution to National Savings. Offices are manned permanently by W.V.S. volunteers while other volunteers do daily canvassing, quite a difficult job to handle.

Other Activities

There are many other activities in the W.V.S. pattern. It is impossible to describe them all, just as it was impossible to see them all in a limited time; activities such as hostesses in clubs for war workers, Information Bureaux such as the big one in the Central Station at Glasgow, Allied Information Bureaux like the one in Princess Street, Edinburgh, where W.V.S. volunteers can answer questions in forty-one different languages. This volunteer personnel is so efficient that some of its members have been given jobs to do by the Home Office in connection with blood donor clinics and vitamin schemes. W.V.S. workers staff vitamin distribution centres, work parties of all kinds, for making bandages, as at the Women's Maternity Council of the Royal Family, Edinburgh.

moss picking parties in Scotland, where sphagnum moss is picked, cleaned and made into dressings, wool picking parties along hedges where sheep leave a good quantity of wool caught, fruit picking parties for making preserves, mending work parties where mending is done for men in the services. The mending is brought by the regimental sergeant-major with mending supplies from the ordnance depot and is collected the next week when new mending is brought in. Mending classes are conducted to teach men in the services and mending kits are made to send men overseas.

In Birmingham at the Lady Mayoress' depot, five organizations work together under the same roof; W.V.S., the Red Cross and St. John's Ambulance, Linen League, Central Hospital Supply Service and Personal Service League. All activities under W.V.S. supervision work in close harmony, pooling their funds. W.V.S. is the covering party for supplies which are located depending on the quota of distribution and needs in the depot. There is provision for a clothing storage, prisoners of war packages, immense rooms where work parties make hospital supplies, bandages, comforts for prisoners of war, mend, etc. From this depot was given the Red Cross quilt sent from Canada to the Queen who gave it to one of the air raid victims of the Birmingham bombing.

Other activities include Service Welfare and Canteens. W.V.S. volunteers staff canteens and hostels for service men and women all over the British Isles. Entertainment vans come under this heading. They consist of mobile vans equipped with a small piano and staffed by talented volunteers who sing and play on the road for men at isolated spots, gun sites, schemes, etc. W.V.S. volunteers also staff mobile and static canteens for dock workers and factory workers.

The outwork factory is another activity of W.V.S. volunteers. All the small parts of cars, tanks, etc., that can be handled out of war factories by inexperienced workers are assembled in these out-work factories, labelled, packed and sent directly overseas. Camouflage is another worthwhile activity. The making of camouflage nets is easy, but requires space. Old houses, floor space in factories and abandoned churches are used to fabricate these nets in looms. W.V.S. handle an increasing number of these nets each month.

Volunteer car pools, known as the V.C.P. constitute an important activity of the W.V.S. and employ a big staff of volunteer drivers. The Overseas Department and the Purchasing Department are also a vital part of the W.V.S.

National Council of Social Service

The National Council of Social Service was established in 1919 to provide a common ground and centre for representatives or statutory authorities and of voluntary organizations concerned with national social problems and for individual men and women who by their experience could take a wide view of the social needs of the nation and of any action which it was practicable to take. It was incorporated in 1924.

The president is Sir P. Malcolm Stewart, Bart., D.L., O.B.E., and the chief woman officer is Miss M. L. Harford. The Council operated in England and Scotland and its function is to promote co-operation throughout the whole field of voluntary social service by means of consultation and discussion.

Except for the higher executives and volunteers who are receiving training, the personnel is paid for the work done. The organization is staffed mainly with professional social workers.

Activities being carried on by the Council at present include Citizens Advice Bureaux, Old People's Welfare, Child Welfare, Personal Service, Nursery Schools, Music and Drama, Occupational Club Movement, Housing Associations, Mental and Moral Welfare, Tuberculosis care and after care, discussion groups and community centres.

The National Council of Social Service, being a consulting and co-ordinating body rather than a functioning one, its activities are objective and can hardly be described. Its principal function is to provide machinery for consultation between a number of agencies engaged with a particular problem.

Women's Group on Public Welfare

This organization was formed in 1939 under the chairmanship of Rt. Hon. Margaret Bondfield and serves the purpose of providing a ground of mutual consultation on matters of common interest amongst a number of national women's organizations. This Group is concerned with the solution of immediate war problems and also with preparation for the vital period after the war. It is hoped that through its machinery, ways and means will be found to stimulate Government Departments and local authorities to educate the public to a real sense of citizenship. There is also a Scottish Group on Public Welfare.

Citizens' Advice Bureaux.—The principal functions of the Citizens' Advice Bureaux is to give information and advice. These Bureaux are set up in every locality and they give information on almost any subject: How and where to get registration cards again after their loss in a raid; how to get duplicates of the lost papers such as marriage licences, leases, permits, etc.; where to apply for valuation service in case of total and partial loss; where to notify of new address, in fact any information that is necessary after an air raid.

Advice is given as to relief, billets, evacuation, etc. No case work is done however, but cases are referred to the different organizations capable of looking after them. Complete co-operation is the key-note of these different services.

